



WILLAPA WHISTLER

A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society

Volume 50 // Issue 2

Summer 2024



Turkey Vulture - Image courtesy of the USFWS

Vultures and the Nature of Waste Management

By Steve Puddicombe, President

Wonderful experiences often occur in the simplest and most serendipitous circumstances. It happens that I had a bit of hamburger tucked back in the refrigerator that went sour and, as I live in the country and there isn't the formality of a garbage can here, I tossed it out of its package and into the nearby woods, not 100 feet from my house.

Within the half-hour, to my delight, there were 8 Turkey Vultures in the alders along with a handful of crows. It was a great view from my upstairs window, watching without startling them as they went to the ground, crows dispersing noisily, and making all too short work of the burger. Within ten minutes they were gone.

For some reason I was somewhat surprised. Not only that these vultures found the rank goodie in the first place, even just a mere half pound of it, but that there were so many of them, and so soon.

It's a good lesson that we should never underestimate the adaptations of our animal brethren to their niches.

The Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes Aura*) is a large bird that soars in thermals with its inverted "V" wings, wobbling to and fro, searching for carrion. With its keen sense of smell, able to detect odors at just a

few parts per billion, yes *billion*, it's the great garbage disposer of the sky. But it doesn't just end there; not only can the Turkey Vulture detect and find carrion, even below forest canopy, it can eat the rotten fare with impunity due to its extremely acidic digestive fluids, enabling it to resist diseases like anthrax, tuberculosis and others that may have killed its food in the first place.

And of course, we recognize vultures by their bald, reddish head, that allows them to dig deeply into a carcass, without tainting feathers and tender skin with rotting and potentially toxic flesh. I love looking at them at close range with binoculars to see those pates, looking like wizened crones whose hair has fallen out. Some see them as ghoulish, harbingers of death. But I chuckle at their unique visage and ability and am glad they're around to "clean up" calf afterbirth, the odd dead elk or deer, or cow, and whatever else might potentially endanger us and other animals with disease.

When it comes down to it, all creation can be reduced right down to the elemental. Still, it's amazing how all the slimes, molds, bugs, worms, eggs, fungus...make it happen, so that the

Annual Picnic

By Larry Turner

Our WHAS annual picnic this year is scheduled for **Saturday, August 10** (weather permitting).

This year, the picnic will be held at a new place: the Turner Residence, 124 Jensen Rd., Kelso, WA. Hours are 2:00pm to 5:00pm.

Attendees are asked to bring one covered dish (a salad, entree, dessert or snack) to feed 4 to 6 people. Each person should bring their own plates, cups and tableware. Ice, water, iced tea, napkins, paper towels, tables and chairs will be provided. Sun and rain protection is available if needed.

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upward creative process begins again, nothing wasted, only life reconfigured. I've often wondered how it is possible for so many vultures to make a living in the "waste" business, as it were. I've never seen a nest and have only ever seen them lurching on a corpse a few times. Yet, they persevere and thrive in our modern landscape.

Mostly I just see them soaring in a wide sky, biding their time, such a welcome sign of Spring.....

My half pound of rotten burger has given me new insight.

Happy Birding!

In this issue of the Whistler:

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Support our mission, join WHAS today!

Membership renewals are due March 1 of each year. If you prefer to pay by credit or debit card use our online form on our website at <https://www.willapahillsaudubon.org/join-renew-donate>

Membership includes 4 issues of our newsletter *WILLAPA WHISTLER* annually. Gift Memberships are available online.

Check type of Membership:

- Individual Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$25 check for annual membership)
- Family Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$35 check for annual membership)
- Lifetime Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$750 check for lifetime membership)

We are a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation. All dues and donations are tax deductible

Please make your check payable to:
WILLAPA HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY or WHAS and mail to:
WHAS-Membership, PO Box 399, Longview, WA 98632.

Name _____
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Thank you for supporting your local Audubon chapter -- Willapa Hills Audubon Society!

We will not share your contact information with anyone. For membership in National Audubon Society visit <https://www.audubon.org/> Chapter# Y14
 *) To announce **occasional** reminders and to communicate last minute changes due to weather or other issues for WHAS programs and field trips.

✂️ -----Clip

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 I prefer to receive the *WHISTLER* by email
 Contact me about volunteer opportunities
 Add me to your announcement email list*
 I would like to support the work of Willapa Hills Audubon Society. Enclosed is my additional donation of \$ _____

Rainier Audubon Nature Festival

June 8, 2024, at Flaming Geyser State Park, Auburn - free Pass Day
 More info here: <https://rainieraudubon.org/event/flaming-geyser-bird-fest-2024/>

Wings over Willapa Festival

September 20-22, 2024
 This annual birding and nature festival is a celebration of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge’s many species and diverse habitats. There will be an array of tours, workshops and other events happening all around the Long Beach Peninsula and Willapa Bay. More info at <https://friendsofwillaparefuge.org/Wings-Over-Willapa>

ACOW 2024

Audubon Council of Washington (ACOW) is the annual, statewide chapter gathering when we get to strengthen relationships with other chapters, discuss shared challenges, and learn from each other. ACOW 2024 will be hosted by Black Hills Audubon Society in Olympia and supported by the other chapters in the southwest Washington region.
 We have reserved a meeting space at **South Puget Sound Community College Lacey Campus on October 4-5 2024** with October 6 as our traditional field trip day.

Willapa Hills Audubon Society donates Birding Kits

By Larry Brandt



This spring Willapa Hills Audubon Society approved funding of two complete “Birding Kits” to each public library in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum and Pacific Counties. This week we delivered kits to public libraries in Longview, Kelso, Castle Rock, Kalama and Cathlamet. Our next delivery, in approximately three weeks, will be to the libraries in Naselle, Ilwaco, Ocean Shores, Clatskanie, Astoria and Rainier.

Each kit consists of one small backpack adjustable for child or adult use, one Occer 12x25 binocular, one Washington

State Birds folding cheat sheet, and one Birds of Washington Field Guide. Also included is an Audubon Map of Birding Locations in Southwest Washington.

These kits will be available soon at your local library. All library rules apply to their usage. Questions or comments can be directed to your librarian or to Larry Brandt, lbrandt@cni.net

Image provided by Ann Cordero

Continued from page one: WHAS Annual Picnic

We do not have Larry Brandt’s nesting osprey, but we do have a list of 60 bird species we have seen here at home. Our star attractions are the very numerous hummingbirds, and perhaps the flocks of goldfinches will still be here. A couple of odd-ball sightings – not to be expected - have been an Acorn Woodpecker and an exotic male Reeve’s Pheasant.

The Turner residence is about 8 miles up into Rose Valley, elevation 500 feet. To get to the Turner house from Longview take Tennant Way east towards I-5. Stay in the left lane to head towards Seattle & Kelso Drive. Then continue in the left lane (towards Kelso Drive) to the roundabout. Take the

first "exit" South (not counting the entrance into the roundabout from the freeway) on to Highway 99 south. In one mile take a left on Rose Valley Rd. After 5.1 miles on winding Rose Valley Road, turn right [slight uphill right] on South Goble Creek Road and wind your way about a mile until you pass a large white barn on the right; then turn right on very steep Zillig Rd. After 0.4 miles, turn left on Jensen Rd - we'll have a yellow sign on the mailbox. We are the second driveway on the right. There should be quite adequate room to park on the pavement.

So, mark your calendars for August 10.

Willapa South

By John Green

Carol Carver, George Exum, and Margaret and John Green, just returned from a trip to Southeast Arizona for an intense two weeks plus of birding.

Working out of B & B's in Tubac, Sierra Vista, and Portal, AZ, the foursome logged just shy of 190 species of migrants and indigenous species in the area. In addition to the plethora of birds, species of mammals and reptiles were observed.

Some of the rarities seen were Rufous-backed Robin, Elegant Trogon, Scaled Quail, and Black Vulture. In addition, 11 species of Hummingbirds, 21 of shorebirds, 12 of raptors, and 15 flycatchers were seen by the group. The



forests were full of warblers and the group saw 15 species of these, along with vireos,

tanagers, and orioles. Some species were ones we would recognize locally.

The Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, and Bullock's Oriole were on their way to the Willapa Hills and other points northward. It is always a joy to see such a huge variety and number of birds doing their bird "thing" of singing, looking for mates and making a living in the natural world and allowing us to enjoy them.

Images clockwise: Elegant Trogon, Coati, Roadrunner, Gambel's Quail



Notes from the WHAS Board

By Steve Puddicombe

Our last meeting was our annual one, just prior to our annual banquet, March 27. We reviewed ballots and determined our board for the coming two years: Steve Puddicombe, President; Sherry Hawkins, Treasurer; Cathy Kendall, Secretary; as well as board members John Gross, Ann Cordero, Robert Sudar, Darrel Whipple and Carolyn Norred. The board also includes committee chairs Gloria Nichols and Stephen Glucoft.

We also reviewed comments from chapter members about a potential name-change. About half recommended “no change” and the rest advocated for a variety of possible new names with “Willapa Hills Bird Alliance” as the favorite by a vote. The ad hoc committee will make a recommendation to the full board as to how to proceed at our next board meeting in June.

Since then, with a vote via email, we have approved an expenditure to assist installing a camera and possible counting device inside the chimney in Rainier that houses Vaux Swifts during migration. The site at Riverside Church has become

important as a roost and Larry Schwitters, Vaux Swift advocate extraordinaire, will be overseeing the installation.

We say “goodbye” to Larry Brandt who has left the board after many years in a variety of capacities. Most recently he was our vice president and conservation committee chair, as well as working with membership and putting out the Whistler. He has taken his many skills to the oversight board of Hanford and we’re all lucky to have him there, looking out for the public interest.

After several years of holding our board meetings via zoom we will be meeting in person next month on June 15th. We always welcome guests with issues to discuss or messages regarding WHAS and our role here in SW Washington conservation.

For more information check out our website or contact a board member.

Earthday 2024 at the Longview Library

By Sherry Hawkins



Despite the weather not cooperating, Earth Day 2024 at the Longview public Library was a success. There was a good flow of interest in our booth with lots of young people curios in our display.

The bird display helped with attracting people. Ann Cordero and Gloria Nicols assisted in the booth and by answering questions. We had copies of the Whistler and a lot of them went so hopefully we will get some response from them.



Image above courtesy of Ann Cordero

Image on right courtesy of Gloria Nichols

An account of the Golden-Crowned Sparrow Migration Through Naselle

By Rex Ziak

Twenty Square Feet of Sparrows



My wife and I often enjoy a cup of tea on the porch while watching our yard birds consume their evening meal. The resident juncos and white crowned sparrows are the most numerous; a fox sparrow and house finch appear now and then. She delights most in watching the black-capped chickadees fly right-side up, then magically flip and grab a perch upside down. Perfect execution every time. Never missing even once.

Around April 23rd I noticed a golden crowned sparrow. Alone, but obviously very hungry. There was nothing unusual about it. We usually have one or two around here, but I hadn't seen any for quite some time.

The next evening he was back. And then I saw another. Two golden-crowned at the same time was nothing exceptional, but a delight to see.

The next evening they were back again, and soon joined by a third. I can't remember the last time I saw three golden-crowned sparrows at my feeders at the same time. Back in the late 1980's it was more common, but they don't appear around here in large numbers. I was happy to see such a strong showing.

Around April 25th or 26th we sat out for another evening tea and I could hardly believe my eyes. There were several dozen golden-crowned sparrow around my feeders. All at the same time! Never in my life had I seen so many. We put out plenty of seed, which delighted them.

I could tell these were wild birds...they did not approach the feeders but instead fed exclusively on the ground.

As everyone knows, the yard birds quickly learn to hop up to the source of the food and feed directly from the feeders whereas the birds unfamiliar with domestic feeders will hunt and peck on the ground. These golden crowned fed only on the seed we scattered; they were not familiar with the ways of us humans.

By April 27th we were inundated with famished sparrows. They were more numerous than summer tourists in Venice.

By April 28th we estimated more than 200 golden-crowned sparrows in our yard. They had discovered the dish of rabbit food we put under the car for the wild bunnies that inhabit the underbrush, and they also discovered the cracked corn dish inside our chicken coop. As far as bird seed went, we were now putting out one and a half coffee cans full every day. Of course, this was distributed only with one tuna fish can at a time...but we fed them every hour.

These golden-crowned sparrows zipped around my house with such speed that I feared a collision. I walked with my hand shielding my face out of fear of being hit and blinded by a high-speed sparrow. They zipped from one side of our house to the other in complete abandonment sometimes passing within inches of my head. It was like standing in the eye of a tornado of birds.

We had let four kale plants winter over and they were now blooming with delicate yellow flowers. The ravenous golden-crowned sparrows discovered these flowers were edible. I looked out the window and saw eight sparrows perched on the

delicate kale branches pecking the flowers to pieces. As you can imagine, kale branches did not evolve to hold a sparrow, so the stems slowly sagged under their weight. They hopped and fluttered and scooted and stretched, appearing like gymnasts in a Cirque du Soleil performance. When they were done the poor, denuded kale looked like it had been hit by a cyclone.

When my wife put the chickens away for the evening, she first had to shoo five golden-crowned out of the hen house

I was dumbfounded.

Did I just witness a migration?

The unexpected appearance and sudden disappearance of these birds strongly suggests this. But I didn't even realize that sparrows migrate.

On two occasions we have had migrations of hummingbirds appear. Our feeders that are used by 3 or 4 hummers will suddenly have 20 or 30 uninvited guests who



Golden Crowned Sparrow – courtesy of the USFWS

before closing the door. Later I walked by and saw two more were trapped inside, apparently concealing themselves during her sweep. It would have been easy to catch and band them, if such a bird banding program existed.

On the evening of the 29th we had a serious discussion about what we were going to do. This swarm of birds had become a problem.

They devoured every morsel of food...whether bird seed, rabbit food, chicken scratch or cracked corn. We began to discuss what we could do if they resided with us all summer. How would we plant a garden? How about our bunnies and chickens? What would the sparrows do to our berry patches? We were down to the bottom of the sack, so I knew I had to dash to Astoria soon to buy more seed.

On May 1st I woke early, put on the coffee and went outside with the can of seed. I immediately knew something was wrong. The trees were silent. I looked around for a stray cat but saw nothing.

I scattered the seed on the ground in all their favorite places and went inside to get my coffee and then returned to enjoy the bird's morning feast.

Not a single sparrow appeared. Even the white-crowned were gone.

Vanished.

I kept waiting. Nothing.

totally disregard all feeder etiquette and ignore the alpha-male in control. It becomes a madhouse around here for a day or two and they are gone. But the golden crowned sparrows were something I had never imagined.

Looking back, as kind-hearted humans, we only hope they received enough nourishment here to build sufficient energy to survive the final leg of their migration in good order. Maybe the extra grams of body fat will result in an exceptional breeding season. Maybe that cracked corn and bunny food energized the females to lay an extra egg which will result in a spike in their population.

But on the other hand, maybe we have done them a great disservice. Maybe by feeding them such abundance we have kept the weak ones alive. Maybe their numbers should thin out during the migration and our generosity and hospitality have given strength so more birds will arrive at their breeding grounds, and this might result in a shortage of nesting opportunities, mates or food. Us humans often intend to help nature, but we may do more harm. We are rarely aware of our impacts....whether negative or positive.

But we feel blessed to have been hosts. We wish them all well.

We don't expect to ever see that again, but next April we will have extra seed on hand, and we will be watching.

WHAS Programs and Field Trips

WHAS events are free and open to the public (Unless otherwise noted). Check the website for the latest information and updates.

Saturday, August 10 at 2pm
Annual Picnic – New location this year!
See the details on page one

The Whistler Online

Did you know that you can subscribe to the Willapa Whistler on our website? All the links are easy to follow.
Go to whistler.willapahillsaudubon.org for this and past issues.

Enjoy your summer and submit you bird story for publishing in our fall Whistler!

Other programs and field trips will appear on our website and will be announced through our email alert system.
More information about the alert system here: <https://willapahillsaudubon.org/get-involved/member-services>

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Send in your stories & photos
Articles, information, wildlife sightings and artwork are most welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the 15th of February, May, August and November. Send your contributions to:
WHAS Whistler, PO Box 399, Longview WA 98632
or email them to newsletter@willapahillsaudubon.org.

Most WHAS activities and programs are open to the public.
The *Willapa Whistler* is the quarterly publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society (WHAS), a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Complimentary copies are available for free on our website.

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